

The Nature of Strategy versus the Character of War

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The Setup

- Since end of Cold War:
 - Those who see novelty
 - Strategy classicists
- Why both sides miss the point by discussing war

Novelty in War

- Since end of Cold War, many have identified novelty in the character or even nature of war
- Martin van Creveld & non-trinitarian war
- Mary Kaldor & new wars
- Fourth-generation war

Strategy classicists

- In the new wars literature:
 - Clausewitz is being misunderstood
 - History is being forgotten
- War is war, despite changes in character
 - War remains most similar to itself despite change

Missing the Point

- Strategy classicists are more right than those seeking novelty
 - But both are off the mark because war is not autonomous, cannot independently change
- The source of the character of any war is strategy

Defining Strategy

- Strategy is all about relationships
 - Geography, technology, etc
- Centerpiece comprises two main relationships
 - Strategy as relationship between tactics and political ends
 - Strategy as relationship between adversaries

Tactics-Politics Relationship (1)

- Begins with Clausewitz's supreme, most far-reaching act of judgment
 - Judgment not only about force, but about the ends sought
- From outset, force is unique and what it can achieve is unique

Tactics-Politics Relationship (2)

- Force is not generic
 - Landpower, seapower, airpower, cyberpower, all different
- Deploying force is not enough
- Force must be employed in the field through tactics

Adversarial Relationship

- Enemy is independent, intelligent, adaptive both tactically and strategically
- The strategies of opposing belligerents never inert
 - Therefore the character of any war is never inert

Forecasting Future Character (1)

- Given the primacy of strategy, how can the future character of war be forecast?
 - Prediction is very hard, especially about the future
- Strategy must be at the center of any forecasting attempt
 - Strategy's two pivotal relationships

Forecasting Future Character (2)

- Politics necessary influence
 - frequently derived from reigning political ideology
 - Politics also identifies enemies to be fought, involving a judgment of their potential threat
 - Choice of enemies may change swiftly
 - Choice of enemies influences the utility of various tactics

Conclusion

- The character of any war stems from strategy-making of belligerents, and the strategies they ultimately employ
 - Practicing strategists must therefore look to strategies employed, rather than to preset categories for understanding any current war
- Character of war has relevance primarily for defense planners
 - They must anticipate the future but lack the necessary details